Interview with Arthur T. Tienken

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR ARTHUR T. TIENKEN

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: As a preface to this, Art Tienken has been one of our major interviewers, so he has been not only through the process, but has interviewed quite a number of people for the program. So, Art, I am putting you on the other side of the microphone.

How did you become interested in foreign affairs?

TIENKEN: Stu, I first became interested in foreign affairs in college in the early 1940s.

Q: Where was this?

TIENKEN: I was at Princeton. And while my first goal in life or desire in life was to join the Navy and go to Annapolis, in those days if you couldn't see, you couldn't get into Annapolis, and I couldn't see. So I then looked into the foreign affairs bit, having started college before World War II.

I had two professors. One in particular, Dana Munro, who was head of the school of Public and International Affairs at Princeton, now the Woodrow Wilson School, had worked a great deal with the State Department. He was very strong on the Foreign Service. I guess the two just came together. He encouraged me, and I was ripe for encouragement. So

even while I was still in college in the early '40s, I thought the Foreign Service would be some place I would like to go. The other professor was Cyril Black, who at that time was professor of Russian history at Princeton. He, too, had worked for the State Department, and he, too, encouraged me.

Then I went off in the Army, came back, graduated, and eventually took the Foreign Service exam, and that was it.

Q: You came in in the State Department in 1949, is that right?

TIENKEN: That's right.

Q: Did you come in with a group of people at that point? I mean, as a junior officer when you came in, did you have sort of a group you were being trained with and all?

TIENKEN: Yes, that was an interesting assignment because it was rather different from the ordinary run of Foreign Service assignments. What happened was, I took the examination in '47 and passed it. I then got on the waiting list, such as happens today. But economy came to the U.S. Government at that time, and they were not taking new classes in. They had taken two classes in right after the war and stopped. The list grew and grew and grew of people that had passed. In 1949, it was decided that people off the list would be recruited to go to Germany to replace military government officers who were in fact part of the High Commission for Germany.

We were the first group. There were twenty-seven of us. We trained here in the States for about three months. On St. Patrick's Day in 1950, we all went to Germany. Technically, the assignment was to Frankfurt because that was where the High Commission was, but, in fact, we were then farmed out all over Germany to be what were then called kreis resident officers.

Q: The kreis being K-R-E-I-S.

TIENKEN: That's correct. Kreis is roughly equivalent to a county in administrative terms. Most of us had two of these little kreis where we were kind of the military governor, if you like.

But we were told when we first came into the program that our main concern was not so much to replace the military government officers that were there, but to further and try and spread democracy in Germany as part of the post-war effort to wean the Germans away from their authoritarian history. And that's what we went out to do. And we were taught such techniques as how to organize town meetings, for example, so that you could get free expression among rural people. Most of them were rural people, who never had that kind of experience before of getting up, saying what they wanted, making their views known to the local German authorities, and so forth. That was kind of fun. We did that.

Q: Where did you go?

TIENKEN: My first assignment was first a training assignment at Schwabach in Bavaria, Schwabach being just south of Nuremberg. We trained with the then military government officer, who also became a kreis resident officer in what you did as a resident officer. We were there about three months.

Then I was assigned to Naila. Naila is a town that most Germans don't even know about. It is up on the very northeast corner of Bavaria close to the East German border and close to the Czech border. It is the area that Hitler jumped off from when he went into the Sudetenland in 1938.

If I told a German today my first assignment in the Foreign Service was Naila in Germany, they would look at me blankly. If I tell them it is Naila by Hof, which was the big city close by, sometimes they know about Hof, and sometimes they don't.

But that was my first assignment. That meant taking my wife and then two children up to this little town of 6,000 souls. No other Americans. I took over an office and attempted to

do what we were told we were supposed to, namely, help spread roots of democracy in that area.

There was American military presence in Hof, but simply a border patrol. They would come by once in a while, and that's all we ever saw of the Army except to go down to commissaries and things like that, once in awhile which were an hour away in Bayreuth.

And we were much on our own. We had a whole network in Bavaria centered in Munich called the Land Commissioner's Office, Land being the equivalent of a state in Germany. Your contact was with them. And then we had another subgroup for Oberfranken, (upper Franconia if you like), headquartered in Nuremberg. We saw those people once in a while, and that was your administrative and policy guidance place. But for the most part, you were on your own.

Our major problem was to learn German fluently enough so as to get along. That also applied to my wife who had to do the shopping and had to get around. We did. We loved it in Naila. As I say, we were the only Americans in town or even in the kreis—I had another one south of Hof called Munchberg, and I would go over there once in a while.

Some of the things you did were traditional Foreign Service, like representation, going to a variety of things, entertaining visitors, who always liked to see the border, and you would take them up to the border, which was only five miles away. East Germany and West Germany were divided by a river at that point, the Saale. You could get up to the border and look across and see the East German police, the Volkspolizei, who were busy looking at you. You brought along binoculars and watched them, what you would see was them with binoculars watching you. That was always a winner as far as visitors were concerned.

For the most part, you went around, and you got to know the local burgermeisters. The kreis had its own administration, so you got to know those people as well. And you

attempted to make friends for the United States, frankly, and do what you could by way of furthering free speech, free press, and so forth.

Q: What type of controls did you have? I mean, you could say don't do that, do that, or something?

TIENKEN: Not quite. You did have certain judicial authority under the occupation statutes in which you were, in effect, the judge for minor cases that would otherwise be tried by the military courts.

Q: What sort of cases would these be?

TIENKEN: Oh, small cases of theft, for example. Basically, that's the only ones I ever had. Maybe I had one or two. And your decision was final. But those were rare.

You had the authority of the whole occupation. You could caution. It was difficult to say, “Yes, you did this. No, you didn't do that.” That wasn't really what we were there for, and that wasn't spreading democracy anyway although the old military government used to be able to do that.

Q: Yes.

TIENKEN: But by the time we got there in 1950—

Q: This is five years after the war.

TIENKEN: This was five years after the war. We had not yet regulated our post-war relationships with the Germans. The end of the occupation didn't come until '52 or '53 when we established our embassy in Bonn. But even before then, we already had the makings of an embassy in Bonn as early as '52. This whole program came to an end in about '53. But by then, the character of the whole job had changed because the Korean War came along in '51.

Q: Actually, in 1950 it started, but the repercussions probably weren't until '51 in Germany.

TIENKEN: That's right. And in, I think, it was '51, there was a considerable concern that the eastern bloc, specifically the East Germans, would take advantage of the war to supposedly invade West Germany and/or western Europe. So at that time, the U.S. sent, I think it was four divisions back to Germany for the purpose of preventing all this from happening. By that time, my wife and I had been transferred to Schweinfurt, which was best known as one of the three targets of Command Decision, saturation bombing during World War II.

Q: There was one of the ball-bearing plants there.

TIENKEN: It was the center of the ball bearing industry.

Q: A disastrous day. It was called Black October or something like that when we sent our planes over to bomb it. Was it '43?

TIENKEN: Yes.

Q: '43. It wasn't well done.

TIENKEN: No. We had kind of expected at Schweinfurt that the Germans there would be bitter about the bombings during the war. Such was not the case, partly because, I guess, the Germans felt that they had been rather successful in fending off the bombings. And, secondly, Schweinfurt was basically a laborers city, and labor was one of the elements that was largely opposed to the Nazi regime and had lost a number of people to the concentration camps.

Q: Yes.

TIENKEN: So—

Q: It means basically social democrats.

TIENKEN: They were Social Democrats. The people of Wurzburg, on the other hand, which was only twenty miles away, did tend to be bitter, largely because at the very end of the war, a British saturation bombing of the rail yards in Wurzburg also wiped out a good part of Wurzburg.

Q: Yes. It's a beautiful old city.

TIENKEN: Yes. A university city.

Q: Well, just one thing here. As a kreis officer, I mean, there would be what, the equivalent to a county leader, a German, and how would you deal with that person and his or her staff?

TIENKEN: Very much as though you were a principal officer today.

Q: You mean a principal officer of an embassy?

TIENKEN: Well, yes, but more like a consul.

Q: Consul.

TIENKEN: We dealt with them pretty much as equals. It became more so when the troops came back because in Schweinfurt they brought back one regiment of the 4th Division, the 22nd infantry regiment, and one artillery battalion. From then on, most of the work of the KROs, the kreis resident officers, involved liaison between the American soldiers and the local authorities. You were the go-between.

Q: So the position had moved more to a representation liaison type—

TIENKEN: Yes.

Q: Job in '50, rather than a direct sort of, “You do this, you do that.” I mean, there was some residue, but very little of that.

TIENKEN: Yes, and we would do such things as organize joint American-German groups, bridge clubs, for example, which was very successful in Schweinfurt. Athletic events. Until about the time the troops came back, the Army had a non-fraternization policy, hands off. They changed that in '51, I think. And then they were looking around for ways of getting along with the Germans. Things to improve the image and so forth. They had no idea how to do that, so they mostly turned to people like ourselves, who were by that time basically liaison between them and the Germans, and we did. I can't say that relations were all that great between the Army and the Germans, but still there was a very different change of philosophy than when I first got there.

Q: It always is difficult. I think our experiences have been joint in that we have noticed that the military really doesn't know how to get along with the civilians very well. It is helpful to have somebody there, particularly foreign civilians.

TIENKEN: Yes.

Q: It's bad enough in any country between the civilians of their own people.

TIENKEN: Well, our biggest problem, as you might imagine, was smoothing over incidents, if you like.

Q: Yes.

TIENKEN: The military is the military. Our very first incident when we first got to Schweinfurt involved a drunken soldier who was driving a vehicle in Schweinfurt plowed into a group of Germans, killed three of them in a single family. This led to a great deal of ill will, to say the least, between the local Germans and the Army. We were successful in persuading the unit to adopt the remaining child, a girl of the family that had been killed

by contributing each payday to a fund, which they did. They got the entire battalion to contribute a little to the fund. That money went to the surviving child, to the guardians, really, for use in the upbringing and eventual long-term education of that child. That helped a lot. That was the kind of thing that you tried to do to get over these bad incidents.

Q: On this, there is no standard operating procedure. I mean, you sit there, and you look at it, and you understand how you should do this. I mean, you understand what you have to do. And that is, smooth the feelings and make it easier, but then you have to figure out how you do that in an individual case.

TIENKEN: That's right, yes. You had one small advantage. Namely, that you were the kreis resident officer and the Germans had always looked to authority and still did then. Whether you had the actual authority or not, you represented authority. You were representing the High Commissioner, John J. McCloy. And so they paid attention to you.

Q: While you were spreading democracy, at the same time, you were using the appreciation—at least at that time—of the Germans for authority. [Laughter]

TIENKEN: That's right.

Q: Well, then I want to move on from this to your time, which was really to continue as a theme throughout your career, dealing with Africa. How did you get involved in African affairs? This is back before the Foreign Service had discovered Africa. We discovered Africa, I might add for the record, in about 1960 when all of a sudden the African states started to appear independent. Up to that time, it was considered sort of a backwater.

TIENKEN: The short answer to your question is by accident. After we left Germany, we were assigned to Lourenco Marques at that time, now, Maputo.

Q: Which is in Mozambique.

TIENKEN: Mozambique. As a junior vice consul in charge of consular work.

Q: Just a regular assignment.

TIENKEN: Just a regular assignment. While I was there, we had a visit from a gentleman named Fred Hadsel. Fred Hadsel was the core of a very small group in the Department at that time who were interested in and dealing with Africa. There was no Bureau of African Affairs then. But they could foresee down the road that there might be one. He visited Mozambique, and while he was there, asked me if I wouldn't like to specialize in Africa and join this small select group. I said, “No.” And that kind of ended it for the time being.

Q: Let me ask, what was your impression of Africa? I mean, before you even went there, of an African assignment?

TIENKEN: An African assignment was the furthest thing from my mind when I was in Germany. But in those days, when somebody said, “You go to Lourenco Marques,” that's where you went. You didn't sort of go back and discuss or argue the situation. You were told to go to Lourenco Marques, and you went.

Q: Yes.

TIENKEN: So we did. Lourenco Marques at that time was Portuguese. It is fair to say it was full colonialism at the time. The Portuguese were very definitely in charge. The Africans had no standing whatsoever. You didn't talk officially to Africans in those days. You had curfews. You had the Portuguese punitive system at work. This was simply colonialism still in full flower. And that stayed on for several years until the late '60s, I guess, when the Portuguese suddenly left the premises.

But Lourenco Marques, from the professional point of view in those days, was very dull.

Q: Was this the reason you said no when Hadsel asked you to become an African specialist?

TIENKEN: That was part of it, yes. Quite a lot of it because Africa in those days was anything but what Africa turned out to be. Here you were as though you were in metropolitan Portugal. You were on the continent, but you had very little to do. There was no political movement, for example, in Mozambique at the time. There were no freedom fighters. There was absolutely nothing substantive that was very interesting. And at that time, I had interests in seeing other parts of the world and doing other things. I wasn't terribly interested in staying in Africa.

It wasn't until 1960, when I first went to the Department as a personnel officer and was given the job of African assignments, that I began being associated Africa again, with one small exception. When I was in Brussels, I was an economic officer assigned in part to the economic side of the Belgian Congo, and our interests as seen from Belgium. But in 1960, I became an African personnel officer. And then my boss, who was later Ambassador Sheldon Vance, asked if I would come to AFC to be Rwanda-Burundi desk officer. I said yes, I think as much because I was very fond of Sheldon and liked to work for him as anything else.

And from then on, I sort of fell into Africa. Most of my assignments had to do with Africa after that. The more I became involved—by this time, Africa was mostly independent and a very different Africa from Lourenco Marques. The more I was associated with it, the more interesting it became to me.

Q: Well, to go back. You were in Brussels as economic officer from 1955 to 1960?

TIENKEN: That's right.

Q: I would like to just concentrate there on your view of Africa. I mean, how did you see Belgians looking at their African possessions, which were extensive at that time?

TIENKEN: The Belgians were fairly authoritarian in Africa as well. Their colonial system wasn't quite as strict as the Portuguese, but it was fairly strict. But the Belgians, unlike the Portuguese, had a little money. And the Congo was a wealthy, comparatively speaking, colony as opposed to Mozambique, which was not. So they had done a fair amount of exploitation, I think is the proper word. But they had also given the Congo a certain amount in return such as infrastructure. What they hadn't done to speak of, was to given them any political education.

And the time I was in Brussels, I was more interested in the economic side of the house, copper and that sort of thing. The embassy as a whole was also interested in the beginnings of the political developments in the Congo. But there wasn't very much you could put your finger on other than there was obviously restlessness that was building up because it was also building up elsewhere in Africa, particularly in the French colonies. The embassy tended to see the Congo in terms of Belgian interests, as opposed to the Department, which saw it more in terms of emerging nationalism and individual and independent countries in those days. And as a result, the embassy in Brussels did not necessarily see eye to eye with those in the Department, of which Fred Hadsel was one, who were interested more in political developments and eventual moves toward independence.

Q: Was there any effort on our part to sort of nudge the Belgians and say you are not educating these Congolese or Rwandese? Because we did have the example of both the French and the British, who had rather extensive nativization programs, if you want to call it, or something, but at least they were having quite a few of the people coming back and getting degrees and all this.

TIENKEN: I think the short answer to that is no. We didn't, to the best of my memory, encourage the Belgians to educate the Congolese, for example. I think you probably know at the time of independence, there weren't more than twenty to thirty Congolese who had ever received more than a high school education. They were basically an uneducated country. But we hadn't made any move, to the best of my knowledge, to encourage the Belgians to do that.

On political terms, the French were the best of the lot in training the Africans in political developments. The British did some of it, but the French were much better at it.

Q: Well, now you came back to State in personnel in 1960. This was quite an exciting time because this is when Africa all of sudden burst forward on the scene. As a personnel officer, did you see a sudden interest and enthusiasm on the part of the Foreign Service becoming involved in African affairs? And, also, what type of person was going for it?

TIENKEN: Well, that was an interesting story. When it became clear that Africa was going to become independent, and particularly the French colonies, because they were the most numerous, it also became clear that we needed some representation beyond which we already had. We had some consulates general in Africa, but not a lot.

And among other things, Loy Henderson and John Jova made a trip to Africa—I think it was probably 1960—to try to decide what kind of representation we should have there. They came back with two minds. One was we should have an ambassador in each of the countries that were going independent. The other was we should have kind of regional ambassadors, accredited to three or four countries. Ultimately, we decided on one for one.

Then the question became how to staff it. So we sent out a world-wide circular saying, “We are going to open X number of posts.” I don't remember, but there must have been twenty, twenty-five of them. “What we need now are people who will volunteer to go to those posts and open them up.” And I was in charge of correlating the results and eventually making

the proposed assignments to all of these posts. We did that, and we got a rather surprising response from people. We were looking for officers at all levels, from principal officer on down to secretaries and communicators.

We got a rather surprising result. More volunteers than we needed, which kind of surprised us. Why those people wanted to go to Africa, I guess I am not totally sure. But certainly one of the motivations was the anticipation of going as a Foreign Service type to a brand-new post in a brand-new area, opening it up, and becoming the first American voice in those countries, not to mention running your own post.

Q: A real spirit of sort of adventure and all this.

TIENKEN: Yes.

Q: I know because I asked for an African post in 1958. Ended up in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. I was a brand-new officer and I wanted to go to Nigeria. I know somewhat the feeling of, "Oh, what the hell? Let's try something out of the ordinary."

TIENKEN: Well, we got a whole raft of very excellent people who volunteered to go. So that our initial staffing, for my money, was very successful. It too suffered from sudden economic problems because we had gone to the trouble of filling all these posts with X number of people. And right as we were about to make the assignments, the brand-new Bureau of African Affairs was told they didn't have enough money to do that. So we had to cut the number assigned in half. This caused great furor in the Department. I can remember telling the executive director of AF, "All is not lost. Let us not go riding off in all directions. We can still do the job." And we did. And we got good people who went out and opened those posts.

Q: So, I mean, as a personnel officer at that time, you weren't in the position of trying to persuade people; you were really in a position of weeding out.

TIENKEN: That's right.

Q: Also, I guess this signifies that it started out, and probably stays today, as a relatively strong bureau, more cohesive than many.

TIENKEN: It does. What it doesn't have today as opposed to ARA and NEA that I think—

Q: ARA being American Republics.

TIENKEN: That's right. And NEA being Near East and Asia, South Asia. Those two bureaus because—well, I won't go in to it because I'm not so sure I know—but both have a long tradition of people that had served for years with the bureau. In NEA's case, largely because of Arabic language. And both had strong cadres of people that go back a long time. AF didn't have that. And because there eventually were fifty countries in Africa, it never really has had that kind of a cadre. Many chiefs of mission, for example, simply because there weren't that many Africans, came from outside, particularly Europe.

But those that were associated with the AF bureau for many years, of which I was one, in effect, found a home there. The group of Africans, if you like, grew but relatively slowly. Some people having served in Africa said that was enough and didn't want to serve there any longer. Those that stayed, I think, built up a good esprit, and I think were well rewarded for staying with Africa.

Still, I don't think it is fair to say that AF has, even today, the same strong cadre of Africanists or at least the relative numbers of Africanists as some of the other bureaus. Still, there is a solid group now.

Q: Well, how did you find the leadership of Governor Mennen Williams, known as Soapy Williams? He came in with the Kennedy Administration in 1961 and was one of those sort of memorable characters within the political appointee group.

TIENKEN: Yes. Well, Soapy didn't know a lot about Africa, but he was determined to learn. I saw him mostly in context of the difficulties in the Congo in the early '60s and in the mid-1960s.

Q: Okay. Let's see. We are talking about Mennen Williams.

TIENKEN: Mennen Williams, yes.

Q: Soapy Williams.

TIENKEN: Soapy spent, it must have been, about four years as Assistant Secretary for Africa. He was generally regarded as an amateur by most of the African people. In terms of the Congo, in those days, much of the problems in the Congo are being referred at higher levels than Soapy: George Ball, George McGhee, occasionally even the Secretary. And at the office director level, was Mac Godley, a rather strong office director. Soapy was in-between. And Soapy became involved in it all right, but Soapy wasn't calling the shots.

Soapy had one characteristic that I have never forgotten. He was a politician, and he was obviously a very good politician. And while he wasn't making decisions of great note as far as Africa was concerned, if you brought a politician—and the early leaders were all politicians in Africa as they are many today—to Soapy, you could watch the two of them get together. They were two politicians getting together. They seemed to recognize in each other what they saw in themselves. And so Soapy could always get along very well with most of the Africans that he dealt with. He couldn't speak French worth sour apples. But that didn't make any difference to Soapy. He would find some way of communicating with these French-speaking Africans. And sometimes I would be present. I continued to be fascinated at how he related to these people, and he related simply because of his background.

Q: His background, yes. Well, you were the desk officer for Rwanda-Burundi from '62 to '63. What were these two countries, or was it one country at that point?

TIENKEN: No, two.

Q: It was two. Do we have any interests in that area at that time?

TIENKEN: Rwanda-Burundi had been a Belgian mandate from World War I. And they, too, were becoming independent after Congo. In '59 or '60, there had been a bloody internal war between the Hutus and the Tutsis. And it was expected that when the two countries became independent, which was 1962, that the two would feud because Burundi was largely dominated by the Tutsis, and Rwanda had, been taken over by the Hutus, who had driven the Tutsis out. It was expected that there might well be war between the two countries when they both became independent. And that was why Sheldon Vance wanted a Rwanda-Burundi desk officer because this would have an important United Nations impact dimension because of the mandate status and also because the two countries were, in effect, of something of the same mold as the Congo, in which we were very interested, being of Belgian occupation.

In fact, that uprising did not occur. And we did not have an important national interest in either country for years and probably still don't for that matter, except for Dian Fossey and her gorillas.

And I only lasted in that job for about a year, and then I took over the Congo desk.

Q: The Congo desk, you were there from '64 to '66.

TIENKEN: No, that was when I was in Elisabethville.

Q: Oh, no, excuse me. You were from '63 to '64.

TIENKEN: That's right.

Q: What was the situation in the Congo as you saw it from Washington, and what were our interests?

TIENKEN: We, in fact, had economic interests. Cobalt, manganese, copper, industrial diamonds, and so forth. We had become fairly deeply involved in the Congo, as you know, early at the time of independence.

Q: This is the time of independence in 19—

TIENKEN: 1960.

Q: 1960, yes.

TIENKEN: We wanted very much to keep some kind of order in the Congo because the Congo was then the largest and potentially the most powerful of the emerging black African states. And if we were to keep some kind of order throughout Africa or see that that kind of Africa developed, you more or less had to start in the Congo, which was the biggest of them all.

Q: Okay. We are talking about the Congo.

TIENKEN: Yes. We were interested in political stability and territorial integrity of the Congo. For example, we did not support the Katanga secession, which broke out in '60, as opposed to the Belgians who, I guess, officially didn't support them, but were very sympathetic.

Q: This is a mineral rich area?

TIENKEN: That's right.

Q: Of Katanga, is it?

TIENKEN: Yes.

Q: Under Tshombe?

TIENKEN: Tshombe was in charge of Katanga all right.

To answer your original question, our major concerns were both territorial integrity and political stability, keeping the country together, hoping that it would provide a nucleus for a future stable Africa. Africa at that time was an unknown quantity as far as what the future would be in any of these countries.

Q: Was the battle pretty well over between the Europeanists and worried about NATO and all within the State Department, and so they were more interested in Belgians interests than in African interests in Africa? I mean, there was sort of a fight between the two bureaus. Was this going on?

TIENKEN: In my early days in AFC, the fight was still going on. The Katanga secession was not quite over. The Europeanists tended to, as I mentioned earlier, look in terms of European and particularly Belgian interests. That discussion was still going on. When the secession ended and things quieted down some, the Europeanists tended to back off some. You didn't have the rather sharp differences and conflict of interests between the two bureaus. The Congo then had problems with a variety of local insurrections, mercenaries, and those went on for years and years and years. But those tended to become more and more surely African problems as opposed to differences between Europeans and the Africanists and the early difficulties between the two bureaus and, indeed, the two embassies—one in then Leopoldville and in Brussels—began to melt away.

Q: Well, then you finally got another assignment and right into it. Was it still called Elisabethville when you went there? Later it was called Lubumbashi.

TIENKEN: Yes.

Q: As principal officer. Could you describe where it is and what the situation was there and around it?

TIENKEN: Stu, I think if you were to ask me my most fun assignment in the Foreign Service, it would probably be Elisabethville. Elisabethville is in the extreme southeast of the Congo, close to what was then the Northern Rhodesia, now Zambian border. It was the copper center of the Congo. In fact, we had a consulate there before independence, but it was staffed by the Bureau of Mines.

Q: My God.

TIENKEN: Two officers, Merdock and Joe Arandale, and Merdock had been there ten years, I think. And Arandale had gone there just before independence.

Q: These were really out of the Department of Interior.

TIENKEN: That's right.

Q: This must have been a unique post.

TIENKEN: Yes, they were nominated by the Department of the Interior. They didn't follow the usual rules and tours of duty. They were specialists, and they stayed there. Elisabethville was a nice climate, so that when the secession broke out, as I mentioned earlier, we tended not to favor Tshombe but rather to get him to end the secession and to integrate with the rest of the Congo. The Belgians, because of their mining interests, tended to be more favorable, although not officially so.

Q: Let's me stop right here for a second.

TIENKEN: Okay. So, as I say, we tended to differ with the Belgians and try to support the UN efforts to end the secession and maintain the territorial integrity of the Congo.

When I got there, the secession was over. It was 1964. I was told by the ambassador, who was Mac Godley at the time, “Mac, what do you want me to do down there?”

He said, “Repair fences with the Belgians. Follow political developments and so forth, but repair fences with the Belgians.”

Q: So, although it was now an independent country, your main task was really pointed towards—what, these Belgian technicians were doing?

TIENKEN: Yes. The mining interest was then Union Miniere du Haut Katanga (UMHK), which was very Belgian. They were still a powerful force in the land. They were providing a good deal of the economic structure of the whole Congo, as a matter of fact.

And I said, “Okay.”

And he said, “Oh, one other thing. I'll be down to see you twice a year on ambassadorial trips. But, otherwise, if you don't put me in a difficult position, you are not going to hear very much from me.”

Q: Yes.

TIENKEN: In other words, “You are on your own.” And I had a lot of fun being on my own. In fact, however, we started out on a rather difficult note because just before we went to Elisabethville, the consulate general in Stanleyville had been occupied by the so-called Simbas. It was a rather tense period.

Q: Could you explain a bit for those that might not be familiar, why it was difficult?

TIENKEN: Well, the Simbas were not a terribly pleasant group of people. They were mostly eastern tribesmen, eastern Congo tribesmen, who were anti-government and recognized the United States as being pro-central government, and so we were a target as well. They took over that consulate and penned up, oh, a half-dozen of our people.

Q: Americans.

TIENKEN: Americans for a 111 days.

Q: And several thousand Belgians and others.

TIENKEN: Belgians and others. What amounted to a full-scale insurrection in the east. The tension was fairly high. We got down to Elisabethville a few days afterwards. The Simbas mounted attacks even in north Katanga to the point where Elisabethville itself began to think it was threatened. In time, the National Congolese Army, the ANC, which did not have a very good reputation, managed to halt the Simbas, and retook Stanleyville, I guess for their only victory that I ever knew of, aided by mercenaries, led by Hoare.

Q: H-O-A-R, isn't it?

TIENKEN: E. H-O-A-R-E. He was a South African. Eventually, they retook Stanleyville.

Q: This was not the Dragon Rouge operation—

TIENKEN: It certainly was.

Q: The United States flew Belgian paratroopers?

TIENKEN: Yes. But they linked up with the mercenaries, who came from the south. Dragon Rouge was the code name for the Belgian paratroopers flown in American military aircraft. They converged in Stanleyville and freed the hostages. Not all of them because—they did free all of the Americans. I'm not certain, maybe one or two died, but they did free

them all. We got some overflow in Elisabethville, missionary families who had lost people to the Simbas at the time.

And a large part of my work in Elisabethville then had to do with visiting and keeping the embassy and Washington informed of what was going on in north Katanga, basically, in a political sense. One of the ways we did that was kind of fun. The Belgians had a consulate general in Elisabethville; so did the British. Those three countries were interested in local developments, Belgians for obvious reasons, the British because the British were like us. They were involved in trying to get the Congolese to move forward as an integrated state. So I and my two colleagues would charter an aircraft, a small aircraft, and split the cost three ways. Then we would go up to visit our interests. We had missionary interests there, as did the British and the Belgians. Fly in to little, small landing strips. Visit the American missionaries, mostly Methodists. Visit the British, who were mostly Church of England, or the Belgians, who were Catholic. They were wonderful sources of information about what was going on in all of these places. And we could get around very well at a relatively small cost to each one of the three governments. Since we basically by that time shared the same interests, we were basically asking the same questions and interested in the same answers. So we had good fun doing that. And I guess maybe I have never had that experience again in the Foreign Service, but it was fun.

Q: Well, how did you deal with the Congolese in your area of responsibility, the Congolese authorities?

TIENKEN: To the extent that you could support their efforts—and the Congolese authorities were basically out of Kinshasa; they weren't necessarily Katangans then—you did so. And you identified yourself with them, which then reflected in the appearance—what do I want to say? The way you were looked at by the Katangans. So you had a certain amount of prestige, if you like, by being associated with the central government. You dealt with them as equals, if you like. They were the local authorities. You also dealt with the army because you were very interested in what was going on in the army. Once

you overcame the military's aversion to civilians fooling around in their business, they could be very friendly and very open.

We had a public safety program in Elisabethville, where aid under the now defunct public safety program provided the local police with a half-dozen jeeps. There were a certain amount of unruly elements there in Elisabethville, some of whom turned up in a fair amount of crime, which we were interested in curbing. Others would get into various little political squabbles of one sort or another.

In the first months of Elisabethville, there was nothing in the stores. You had to do your shopping in the Copper Belt of Northern Rhodesia. To get there, you went on a two-lane badly kept highway in convoy because you were not sure that there were not elements of a bandit nature out there that would intercept individual vehicles. That disappeared after probably six months. You could then drive in relative safety. But there were still incidences of banditry, along that road. And so we hoped to help the Congolese curb that kind of thing with this public safety program.

Public safety, as you probably know, eventually disappeared because of a variety of reasons. Congress no longer wanted us in that business.

I did a fair amount of representation. There was a lot of political reporting to do, so you made your usual contacts with all the local leaders. Every Congolese in those days was a politician, anyway, and they all had their views of what was going to go on. So there was lots to do. As I said before, it was lots of fun doing it.

The embassy was a thousand miles away. Mac Godley kept his word. He didn't bother me, and I didn't get him in trouble. He made his couple of visits a year. And I would go up there once or twice. But, basically, I was pretty much on my own and had a heck of a good time doing it.

Q: Oh, yes. It sounds like an ideal assignment.

TIENKEN: It was.

Q: Well, then we might keep moving on here. You went to the War College for a year.

TIENKEN: Navy War College.

Q: Navy War College from '66 to '67. And then you were in the State Department in the Director of Central African Affairs from '67—

TIENKEN: Actually, Deputy.

Q: Deputy from '67 to '69. What did this involve? What would be called Central Africa?

TIENKEN: It was once again the Congo, now Zaire, Rwanda, Burundi, Madagascar, of all places, and Congo Brazzaville, which was quiet, and if I remember right, the Central African Republic, which was also fairly quiet. And that was it. Oh, we had Mauritius. I'm sorry, we had one more. Why we got Mauritius, I don't know.

Q: I guess it was Madagascar.

TIENKEN: But we were in on the creation of independent Mauritius. One of my jobs in those days was helping the Mauritians establish their embassy in Washington.

Q: Well, looking at this at this point. I've talked to a diplomatic historian who said "examine the viewpoint at that time, why did we see things—were we still seeing things as a Soviet bloc threat or Soviet threat to that area, and why did we think this?

TIENKEN: There was always the feeling that the Soviets would take advantage of turmoil in Africa to establish themselves stronger. That went back to the beginning days of African independence. I suspect there is still an element of that yet even today in the minds of some of the people that deal with Africa. Certainly that was an element.

And, indeed, in the early days of the Congo, the Soviets did mess around there quite a little bit. They got chucked out at least once, and I think maybe even twice by Zaire for what the Zairian felt was unwarranted interference in their internal affairs. And Gizenga, who was one of the rivals along with Lumumba—Lumumba who was maybe questionable as to how much of a neo-Communist he really was; Gizenga, however, was not. He was pretty much identified with the Soviets. And there was a period of time when there was real concern that Gizenga would become leader of the Congo.

Q: So to put it in medical terms, when we sometimes seem to have a paranoia about the Soviet Union, there was a basis to that paranoia. The Soviets really were out to try to do something there.

TIENKEN: Oh, yes. And indeed later when I was in Ethiopia and presiding over the virtual dissolution of the American embassy in Addis, that was the time when the Soviets came in, along with the Cubans, and became the main supporter of Mengistu. That was a real threat. In fact, not only real, but it actually happened. So that the Soviets in those days certainly were not adverse to taking advantage of the situation if they could in Africa.

Q: Well, looking at that, while you were sitting there watching this area, which we felt was important particularly because of both its size and the mining interests and all, how good information were you getting from other agencies, particularly the Central Intelligence Agency. This being an unclassified interview, as you know. How well were you served there as opposed to or in conjunction with those who were doing the regular reporting from those areas?

TIENKEN: In Zaire, I think it would be fair to say that we were very well served by our intelligence people. Not only CIA, but even the military. True, we had very close contacts within the Congolese Army, and that made it possible for that kind of intelligence to take place fairly easily. But by and large to answer your question, I think we were well served

by both the military intelligence and CIA. We also had a fair amount of military assistance, which is a different kind of a military program. And I think that was done reasonably well.

Q: So we weren't going off in different tracks as far as, say, the intelligence saying you have a real problem here and our people feel the same or no we don't or vice versa. They complemented each other rather than opposed each other.

TIENKEN: Yes, I think that is fair enough. The only divergence of opinion that I knew, and it wasn't even in my time, was in the early days of the Katanga secession where the Agency people were seeing developments that the State people weren't. And there was a fair amount of divergence of opinion as to what we ought to be doing in Katanga as a result of it. But as time went on, I can't say whether or not that Agency position was shared by their own people in Kinshasa as well or Leopoldville as well. I think not. I think it was fairly local. But since Katanga at the time was the centerpiece of the problems in the Congo, the fact that we didn't necessarily see totally eye to eye in intelligence terms, I am told, although I didn't have that problem, did cause some problems, which later disappeared.

One comment on the other agencies, at least my first experience with the Congo when I was in Elisabethville and Mac Godley was ambassador. Mac went out of his way to assemble what he considered to be a very strong country team. And they were all good. The then USIA officer was a little strange, but he did know his business. And when Mac left the Congo and went to—I can never remember whether it was Cambodia or Laos—he took practically all the agency chiefs with him and formed the same team there, which was a measure of the confidence he had in that group.

Q: Yes.

TIENKEN: So I think it is fair to say that the embassy did work as a very strong team.

Q: Speaking of teams, when you were back in African Affairs—this was '67 to '69—Joseph Palmer was the head of African Affairs. How did he operate, and how did you evaluate him?

TIENKEN: Joe was a professional. I had probably less to do with him than I might in other cases because my first boss then was Dean Brown. Dean Brown was undoubtedly one of the strongest officers I ever worked for. Dean was calling a great number of the shots in Zaire (once again we were interested primarily in Zaire.)

It was another bad time. This one involving mercenaries again, who came into Zaire from Angola, theoretically with the old Katanga gendarmes with the supposed mission of dethroning the central government. We spent a lot of time on the mercenary issue. But the shots were called by Dean as much as anybody else. And unless Joe Palmer had rather strong views on the subject, he let Dean do it. This time, unlike the first time in the Congo, the issue didn't escalate all the way up to the seventh floor.

Q: The seventh floor, in our parlance, means up to the Secretary of State.

TIENKEN: That's right.

Q: His immediate entourage.

TIENKEN: So that a good deal of our policy was in fact coordinated and developed by Dean Brown as much as anybody else. Joe stayed interested, to the best of my recollection, and gave Dean full support. But as long as Dean was, in effect, running the show the way it seemed it ought to go, Joe did leave Dean a lot of latitude. And it worked.

Q: Well, then you served as deputy chief of mission in Lusaka from 1969 to 1972. Could you explain where Lusaka is, and what was the situation there?

TIENKEN: Lusaka is the capital of Zambia, former Northern Rhodesia, which as it happened was only 375 miles south of Elisabethville. It is in Central Africa.

Zambia's chief economic interest was also copper. Northern Zambia was the Copper Belt. We were very much interested in that as well. But we were more interested, or at least as much interested, in developments south of Zambia which had to do with what was then Southern Rhodesia; Ian Smith's efforts to establish an independent Rhodesia and our relationships as far as that was concerned; and our relations further south than that in South Africa. So a good deal of the time of my then boss, Oliver Troxel...

Q: Was he career?

TIENKEN: He was career, and I guess maybe one of the smartest officers I ever knew.

A good deal of the time was spent evaluating our position with regard to the developments in Rhodesia and Zambian opposition to it because they were very much opposed to it. We were not quite as much in line with Zambian thinking in regard to the Southern African problem as we later became. And so while Troxel had a number of opportunities to discuss the Southern African problem with Kenneth Kaunda, who then and now is president of Zambia, we were perceived as being not as sympathetic as we should be to black African perceptions of developments in Rhodesia.

Q: How did you feel about relations with South Africa at that time? I mean, this is something you dealt with. You had private feelings as well as the official policy. Did you feel we were doing it right, wrong?

TIENKEN: That was hard to say because we were concentrating more on the Rhodesian problem rather than the South African problem. Apartheid, of course, was already a long-established problem, and there we had no difference with the Zambians, although I suspect now and then the Zambians didn't think we were as strongly opposed to it as we

should have been. But on that score, we were more or less on the same wavelength as the Zambians.

Lusaka harbored, and I guess still does, a whole series of what were called freedom fighters in those days including the ANC, the African National Congress. And we maintained sort of discreet relations with those people, although to be officially associated was not then American policy. But we didn't provide the kind of support for any of those organizations that the Zambians thought we ought to be doing. We rather limited it to just talking with them.

And there were a whole bunch of them. There were two Rhodesian freedom fighter groups. There were Mozambican. There was SWAPO—SWAPO being the Southwest African Political Organization that you still here about today. And the South African, the ANC, the African National Congress. That took up a fair amount of time of one of our officers. And when we got certain visitors from Washington who invariably wanted to talk to these people, we could manage to arrange that. But we didn't go beyond that in those days.

Q: You say we are involved. What was our attitude, and what were you doing as regarding the Southern Rhodesian problem? This is during the time of—what was it called?

TIENKEN: UDI.

Q: UDI, yes.

TIENKEN: Unilateral Declaration Independence.

Q: On the part of the white minority in that area.

TIENKEN: The last thing we wanted to see was what amounted to white dominance of Southern Rhodesia by a minority of something like one to twenty with the Africans having

very little say in how their future would be disposed of. And we were very much supportive of efforts to prevent Ian Smith from doing that.

We, however, looked to the British whose area of former colonialism Southern Rhodesia was, to take the lead. So to the extent we could, we supported whatever the British were trying to do, which was basically to keep some kind of balance, if you like, between the whites and the blacks in an effort to give the blacks much more responsibility and independence than they had. Again, it was a question of stability. This was a fairly volatile area. There was the South African problem itself, and we did not particularly want to see another white-dominated country growing up in Africa. So we tried to support, efforts to work out a multi-racial solution and then to curb Ian Smith and his efforts to establish basically a white-dominated Southern Rhodesia, Zimbabwe as it became.

Q: Did you have much contact with our people in Salisbury? We had a consulate general there.

TIENKEN: We still had a consulate general there. Not really. Physically, the Department did not wish to see official Americans going back and forth between Salisbury and Zambia, so you didn't get down to talk to our people in Salisbury. Of course, we exchanged telegrams and that sort of thing. But in terms of contacts, the answer was probably no.

Q: I was just wondering whether in your dealing with the African problem—we had a policy and it was perfectly justifiable in the moral terms with having the white minority leave this in a way it is comparable to how one can look at the South African situation even today. But at the same time, in realistic terms, you have seen places kind of fall apart. When the black majority, which would not have the training or the contacts or the experience to take over, were we sort of saying, "Okay, we should support this, but in our hearts we know that the place will essentially collapse"? I mean, was that the feeling, or did you have—

TIENKEN: No, we really didn't believe that. Yes, there had been difficulties with some of the new governments in Africa. The Congo was certainly one of them. Only a part, for

example, of the black population actually took power. There were rebellions of all sorts in other parts of the same country. My recollection is that we thought perhaps that would be happen also in Rhodesia, but we still didn't think that the Rhodesian problem properly handled would lead to another Congo, if you like. As it turned out, as you know—it was after my time in Zambia—while there have been difficulties in Rhodesia and still to this day I guess there are some, you didn't have a copy of what happened in the Congo in Rhodesia. When it became Zimbabwe, Mugabe took over and managed the country reasonably well and still does as far as that goes. So I guess the answer to your question is no, we didn't really think the country would fall apart.

Q: Well, again, moving on, you left Lusaka in 1972, and you were diplomat in residence at Marquette University for a year. Then from 1973 to '75, you were the deputy chief of mission in Tunisia. Since our interview is probably more concentrated on other parts of Africa, what was the situation, and how did you operate as deputy chief of mission there? Was this a different kettle of fish than your other posts?

TIENKEN: Well, in the sense that Tunisia was basically an Arab country rather than an African country, and you had to remind yourself from time to time that in fact it was on the African continent.

Q: Yes.

TIENKEN: And a member of the Organization of African Unity. The Tunisians didn't particularly look south of the Sahara at African problems, and so we spent very little time dealing with them on Africa. And my ambassador at the time was Talcott Seelye, who was one of the premier Arabists of the Department. That was his major interest. The problems that we had or the interests that we had in Tunisia were essentially Middle Eastern problems and/or Mediterranean problems but not African problems.

From my own point of view, the Tunisians were one of the nicest people that I ever spent time with. Bourguiba, the then president, had a very soft spot for Americans in his heart.

His was the only country that allowed Sixth Fleet port visits for years and years and years. And he made no bones about it. And he often decorated Sixth Fleet commanders. He genuinely, I think, liked Americans, and it showed. So dealing with the Tunisians was very easy. And Bourguiba certainly was not a radical Arab, so that his views on some of the Middle Eastern problems, particularly the Israeli and so forth, while I wouldn't say always coincided with ours, were a lot closer to some of our views as what ought to go on there than some of the other Middle Eastern countries.

Seelye left me pretty much to run the embassy, and he did much of the political work. He had a relatively easy time, I think.

Q: No great crises at that point?

TIENKEN: We never had any crises. Tunisians occasionally could be just as volatile as other Arabs when they had what they thought reason to be so. And, indeed, well before I got there, I think in the beginning '70s, they had, in fact, attempted to attack the embassy. And if there were incidents in the Arab world that they would take badly, there would be a certain amount of tension in Tunisia. But by and large, it was a peaceful, quiet place. There were no great differences of opinion or problems that we had to cope with.

Q: Moving from that—I think somebody must have been playing a little balance game and said, "Okay, Art, you have had a nice time there, I think we will keep you in the African continent, but we are going to put you to what at that point was probably our most difficult post in Africa." And that is Ethiopia, where you were deputy chief of mission, and I imagine charg# for quite a bit of time from 1975 to '77. Could you explain what the situation was in Ethiopia in 1975 at the time you arrived?

TIENKEN: Yes. I arrived in Ethiopia having received a telegraph from the Department saying, "You have an outstanding opportunity to serve in an interesting area."

Q: [Laughter] This is the kiss of death.

TIENKEN: “As DCM. Would I go?” The “would I go?” part was largely because I hadn't even done two years as DCM in Tunis and wasn't up for assignment at the time. So my wife and I thought it over, and we decided, okay, we would go.

We got there a month before the first anniversary of the overthrow of Haile Selassie in '74. At that time, the worst atrocities of the immediate post-revolution—in my view, it really was a revolution—period were over. Many of the high-ranking and high-born Amharas, which formed the core of Haile Selassie's government, had been jailed, imprisoned, killed, or otherwise disposed of. Things were somewhat quieter by the time I got there. They were anticipating that the first anniversary of independence in September of '75 would be the announcement of a political party, which presumably would be leftist in origin. In fact, it did not happen.

But what you had as a government was a group of army types. Nobody ever knew the exact number, but it was estimated at around 120 officers and non-commissioned officers. The military, I believe, were not supposed to rank higher than major or lieutenant colonel, but I am not sure that is true, they constituted something called the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC), also known as the Derg.

Q: D-E-R-G-E.

TIENKEN: D-E-R-G.

Q: D-E-R-G.

TIENKEN: Yes. And they were the real power in Ethiopia. But they also had a whole, what you and I would recognize, as a whole government infrastructure. You had ministers, and you had ministries, and you had all the people doing the kind of things that they were supposed to be doing as though there were no Derg at all. The only problem was that if you went to the foreign minister, for example, with a request of one sort or another or any ministry, you could never get an answer because they couldn't answer. They would

have to refer the question to the Derg, and the Derg would make the decision, which was somewhat frustrating, to say the least. And you, as a diplomat, had no access to the Derg. You only access you had was to the civilian ministries. So you found yourself in the position of not being able to deal with the power structure but having to deal with an intermediary, in effect, namely, the civilian ministries.

Q: You couldn't approach the Derg directly?

TIENKEN: You could try, but you would never get appointments. Nothing happened.

In '75, relations with the United States, because of the fact that the Derg gave every sign of being far more left than Haile Selassie's government was, were beginning to go downhill. We still had a considerable AID mission. We still had a considerable military mission. Those were to erode in the next year and a half until the spring of '77 when Ethiopians told us to send all of our military home; close the consulate general in Asmara; close Kagnew Station, which was a military communications station in Asmara; send home USIA; leaving a skeleton of what I originally knew when I first went there. The story of how the relations deteriorated is long, and we can go into that if you want.

Q: Why don't we go into that. In the first place, you went out as deputy chief of mission. At that time, the ambassador was Ross Adair.

TIENKEN: Art Hummel.

Q: Art Hummel, who was a professional officer. Could you describe his style of operation?

TIENKEN: Art Hummel was former USIA. He was basically a China expert. And his real expertise was China and the Far East, but he had become ambassador in Ethiopia.

Q: Why was he in Ethiopia?

TIENKEN: I have no idea. [Laughter]

Q: [Laughter] Just the system. No opening for an ambassador in China.

TIENKEN: There certainly wasn't an opening in China.

Art was one of the most competent Foreign Service personnel I ever served with. His style was relatively low-key. But I can often remember when something would come up, more often than not on military assistance matters, suggesting to Art that maybe we ought to try out this idea or that idea on Washington. And Art would look at me square in the eye, and he would say, “I am not going to do that. All Washington is going to tell me is 'shut up and drive.' And that's what I am going to do.” And that's what he did. And I think he is very good at it.

By that time, the Derg had begun to go fairly far left. By the end of '75, they had already established some contact and probably made some commitments to the Russians. Ethiopia, then as now, had a variety of insurrections they were trying to control. The largest one being in Eritrea, but they had some others as well plus a number of dissident groups outside of the country that would have dearly loved to overthrow Mengistu and company, Mengistu being the most noted figure in the Derg although he wasn't the chairman at the time.

Military assistance was important to the Ethiopians. We had a long-standing military assistance program with the Ethiopians. But the Derg was beginning to make clear that they wanted military assistance, among other things, to put down some of these insurrections, notably in Eritrea, and that did not please us. So the issue began to be joined over whether we would continue to provide military assistance or not. The fact that the Derg was pretty much leftist was beginning to turn off people in Washington. And as time went on, the Ethiopians in '75, early '76, asked for $20 million more in military assistance. Washington elements were not strong on that. We eventually gave them seven in ammunition, and that upset the Ethiopians.

I am fairly sure, although I can't be absolutely certain, by that time, they had decided that their military future was not going to lie with us but with the Russians and/or the Cubans. And they had begun to turn to them already.

Our failure to provide the kind of military assistance they wanted escalated over time. By the time Art Hummel left, which was the summer of '76, there wasn't very much an American ambassador could do to maintain normal relations with the Ethiopians. I was then charg#. We had not replaced Art Hummel as ambassador. As a matter of fact, I spent sixteen months as charg# and turned my job over to another charg#.

We had notified, the Ethiopians we were going to close Kagnew communications station in Asmara. This came at no great surprise, in my view, to the Ethiopians, but they took it as another example of the United States wishing to disengage itself from—

Q: Why were we closing it? I mean, we had lavished so much, you might say, political capital, as well as AID money with Kagnew Station being the focal point of all our policy in Ethiopia for years.

TIENKEN: Well, Kagnew was, in fact, a communications station. By the middle '70s, its utility as a communications station was being overtaken by newer and better methods of communications: satellites for one. So that even before I got there in '75, we had cut back what in the late '60s and mid-'60s was a complement of well over 3,000 in Kagnew to maybe as many as twenty. We maintained a skeleton station there, but that is all.

In effect, the answer to your question is it had been overtaken by technology, and we no longer had a particular use for it. And besides that, the political climate was getting worse and worse. And it would be harder and harder to maintain ourselves there.

So we notified them we were planning to close the base. I don't personally think that was a great surprise to Mengistu and company, but they seized upon it as another instance of lack of American support for the revolution. And shortly thereafter on one Saturday

afternoon, I had been working much of the day, for reasons I don't remember, I went out to play nine holes of golf.

Q: You were saying you got four notes—this is in case we missed it.

TIENKEN: Yes, four notes. Close down MAAG the Military Advisory Groups, close the consulate general in Asmara. Send home the naval medical research unit. Closing Asmara also involved Kagnew Base. “And send home USIA.” And we had four days to do it.

This was on a Saturday afternoon. The next day, Ethiopia was shut down, so, in effect, we had only three days to do any talking at all with the Ethiopians. The Ethiopian Army, in effect, occupied USIA and wouldn't let our USIA people in.

On Sunday, I finally got a hold of somebody and said, “Look, four days is a little short for all of this.” Eventually, we got it extended to seven days. But by that time, we had geared up an evacuation. The military sent in a commercial aircraft to get out all the dependents and most of the military people. The MAAG chief had managed to get permission from the Ethiopians to fly in four C-141s every day to take out equipment. We managed to get at least one or two flights into Asmara and close that. So by the time I managed to get an extension of three days, most of the work had been done that we could do. And we got the people out in the four days all right, but the other three days were spent getting equipment out and assembled in the compound in Addis.

I had some doubt that that was the end of the story, and it turned out it wasn't because that was April. By the end of May, chapter two arrived in the form of three more notes, this one sending the military attach# home, cutting the embassy in half, and cutting the Marine detachment, which was then ten, by two-thirds.

By this time, I had actually seen Mengistu, who was then the undisputed leader of the Derg, mostly at his request in a totally unrelated matter. He wanted us to provide additional

military assistance, mostly in the form of spare parts. Again, mostly in support of F-5Es that we had provided somewhat earlier.

Q: These are fighter—

TIENKEN: Fighter aircraft, yes.

Q: Fighter bombers.

TIENKEN: With the Ethiopians claiming that we had agreed to provide it, and the Ethiopians had even paid for part of it, which was in fact true, as a matter of fact. So I had a long conversation with Mengistu basically on this subject earlier. I had to go back and tell him that we weren't really interested in providing very much with all this equipment. By that time, Somalia had become an important item in the equation. And that's a different story; we can come back to it in a moment, if you like.

So by the time I got the second note, I asked the foreign ministry if we do slightly better than 50% in the State Department complement. And typical Ethiopian operation, the foreign minister couldn't answer that question. I would have to go see Mengistu. “Can you arrange another meeting with Mengistu?” They thought they might do that.

So I had my third meeting with Mengistu. And the third one was to ask him if we could maintain a strength of twenty-eight people at the Embassy, which was slightly better than 50%. And he sort of dismissed that and said, “Work with the foreign minister.” He eventually agreed with the twenty-eight, by the way, which I think is still the number of people. That was ten years ago.

I said, “On the question of Marines, Mr. Chairman, you're a military man, those Marines' sole purpose in life is to guard the embassy 24 hours a day 7 days a week. To cut them from ten to three, which is what you asked, would make it impossible to do that. You know

very well that you can't use three men twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, to guard an embassy."

He said, "Is that their only job?"

I said, "That's their only job."

"Do I have your word on that?"

I said, "You have my word on that."

"Okay, two-thirds you can keep." And I think they have even added one since then.

We sent the military attach# home, as well. This time, the British and the Egyptians got in the act. Their military attach#s also were sent home at the same time. And that was item number two, or the second shoe drop, if you like.

A bone of contention at the time was Somalia, because this was May of '77. The Somalians were making loud noises about recovering the so-called Ogaden, which is mostly desert in southeast Ethiopia. The Somalians had a doctrine, and I guess they still do, of greater Somalia, which includes part of Ethiopia, part of Kenya, Djibouti, and—

Q: They have a five-pointed star in their flag.

TIENKEN: That's correct.

Q: Which represents a bone of contention with every one of the surrounding states.

TIENKEN: Yes. Up until then, the Soviets had been strong supporters of the Somalis and provided all kinds of military assistance. But when the Soviets began flirting with the Ethiopians—I think the Soviets would have liked to have made it possible for them to provide assistance to both of them and be the great friend to both of them—Somalis didn't see it that way. And a series of events led up to one of the curious switches that I had ever

had anything to do with in my Foreign Service career which is the Somalis then turned to us—Somalis being one of the most radical countries in Africa at the time—for further military support. And the Soviets were left with the Ethiopians.

We were all for—at least Carter I think was all for—lining up the Somalis on our side, but there was a strong feeling in Washington that some of that military support was going to go for Somali efforts to recover the Ogaden, which we didn't want any part of. So we made a great pitch that any military assistance that we provided the Somalis would be for defensive purposes only. And I had to take that line with the Ethiopians, who didn't believe it for a moment.

Q: You didn't either. [Laughter]

TIENKEN: Well, as it turned out, we never did provide the Somalis with weapons until something like five years later.

Q: Oh.

TIENKEN: But by that time, the Ogaden War was long over, and lots of water had gone under the bridge.

But back then in the spring of '77 when they were sending our people home, this was an element. No question about it. I did my best to convince Mengistu himself and the foreign minister, Feleke, that these weapons that being rather absent for the Somalis were, in fact, for defensive purposes only, and we weren't going to provide them for assistance in making war on Ethiopia. As I say, I don't believe for a moment that the Ethiopian government had placed any credence in that at all.

Q: Well, while much of this was going on, did you have any feeling about, "Oh hell, why don't we just shut the place down?" Or was anybody making these noises?

TIENKEN: There was some thought about it in Washington, but I felt then, and I still do, that Ethiopia was of sufficient importance in the Horn of Africa and in Africa itself. It had a certain strategic location, as you know, because it is on the Red Sea, it is on shipping channels. That in itself, although it never really had the strategic importance that some people thought it might, nonetheless, that was an element.

But I always felt that even after being battered by all these various notes and sending people home—we should stay. The Ethiopians were attempting to cope with a variety of political movements in Addis itself, and had initiated something called the Red Terror, which in its ultimate manifestation was bazookas, machine guns, and rifles being fired every night along about dusk, and people getting killed. Fortunately, they were not foreigners. I felt it was important that we retain a presence in Addis in the realization that we were going to have no influence worth anything for the foreseeable future as a result of almost severing relations, sending all these people home, and the switch to Eastern bloc assistance, Russian assistance. Still, I thought it was important to stay there as a listening post, as a presence, and just to be there should there come a time when the Ethiopians felt that they didn't really want the advice of the Russians and the Cubans.

Q: This is always the thing. If you are not there, you are not there.

TIENKEN: That's right.

Q: At the time. If you can hang on, I mean, particularly a government such as this—I mean, there is the knowledge sitting off to one side that there could be a palace revolt or anything could happen, and you might as well have somebody on the scene to work for our interests.

TIENKEN: Yes, that was my view.

Q: Were you getting any different view from Washington?

TIENKEN: For a while there was some thought that we ought to close the embassy, but it never got much steam in Washington. I think it is fair to say that certainly the State Department and eventually the NSC and the administration itself, in effect, came to the same conclusion that we ought to keep a presence there. And so we did.

I even felt that we ought to make an effort to assign an ambassador back on the assumption that no charg#, whether it was interim or permanent, would have the access to the Derg, if there were to be any, that an ambassador could have. The State Department was rather cool to that one for a while, but they finally decided that they would try. And they did pose a name for ambassador toward the close of 1976. I guess I can't tell you who it was, but he was given agreement. His name was submitted but never acted upon at the end of the Ford Administration. And it died in the interim between the Ford Administration and the Carter Administration that was elected in '76.

Meanwhile, the Ethiopians, rather surprisingly, nominated an ambassador to the States. We gave him agreement, and he did go. He almost did not because shortly before he left, he was driving from the palace down to the foreign ministry on a kind of a S hill, and his car was attacked by a machine gunner. He survived; he was not hit. But he immediately decided it was best to get out of the country, which he did. And to all of my efforts to have him introduced officially into Washington as the new Ethiopian ambassador and being met by protocol and all the things you do with a new ambassador, he said, “Don't worry.” He called me before he left. “Don't worry. I'll let them know when I'm there.” [Laughter]

He did not last very long. He had been the minister of defense. Shortly after he got to Washington, Mengistu called all his ambassadors home. The ambassador, Mandefro, I think read the handwriting on the wall, and he did not go.

Q: Oh.

TIENKEN: Shortly thereafter, he was no longer ambassador, but I think he is still in Washington, as a matter of fact.

Q: Okay, we have just come back from lunch on the same day. Art, at that time, I guess it was a major revolt in Eritrea, isn't it? How did we view that?

TIENKEN: Yes, there was a major revolt in Eritrea, and it had been going on since 1960. There were two main Eritrean resistance units, if you like, both of them leftist in orientation. But we had taken the position beginning in 1960 that Ethiopian territorial integrity should be preserved. Therefore, we never did support, and do not to this day, the Eritrean separatists. They are politically more left than we would like, in any case, but that has not been the major concern. The major concern has been, as it has been in much of Africa, to avoid this sort of thing that would break up the Ethiopian state, which the succession—

Q: We have quite a consistent policy throughout Africa. We just don't want to see it breaking up into a whole series of places.

TIENKEN: That's right.

Q: Well, while you were there, was our consulate in Asmara playing any role at all? Or was it just sort of a housekeeping organization?

TIENKEN: Yes, it played a role to the extent that it could. For much of the time until it was closed by one of those four notes that I told you about before, their movement was restricted to the city of Asmara itself. Any time they got out of that, if they could even get out, and they couldn't, you were in dangerous territory. You used to be able to go down to the Port of Massawa, but you had to fly. There is a road down, and I gather a fairly decent road, but I don't recall any of our people ever being able to drive it. I almost got to Massawa once, and then the Ethiopians decided that they wouldn't be responsible for my safety if I did go down there.

Q: In Massawa?

TIENKEN: Yes. And turned it off. But the major role of the consulate general was observing and reporting, which you could do within limits. And it was virtually the only information that we had that we felt had any reliability at all as to what was really going on in Eritrea. They did a good job, again, within the limits of what they could do.

Q: Well, there were some kidnappings—over six Americans in total were kidnapped. I am not sure if they were quite during your period or not. Did you get involved with these?

TIENKEN: Yes, there were a number of kidnappings. I can't think now, Stu, whether any of them were when I was there or not. My memory is no.

Q: Well, okay, it may well not have been. My question was, did we play any role in it? But if you don't recall it—they were taken and then eventually let go?

TIENKEN: Yes. In all cases, they were, that's right.

Q: While you were there, were we doing anything to help the former ruling class and the kin of Haile Selassie get out or try to protect them?

TIENKEN: The answer is no.

But while I was there, two American missionaries—they were husband and wife, particularly, the wife—were determined to get out a number of the royal family children. The woman has since written a book on the subject, Codeword Catherine. And they got them. They got eleven of them out on a fancy little operation of landing a plane on the shores of Lake Langano, which is three or four hours south of Addis.

But that was a private operation. They had let me know when I was charg# that they might try this. I had no instructions one way or another on the subject, but I was not going to get involved in it, and we didn't. My concern, however, was that the Ethiopians were

so unpredictable that if they tried it, there would be repercussions on the Americans remaining in Ethiopia, and I told them so. That, however, didn't stop them, and they did run the operation, and they did get eleven children out.

Q: Were there repercussions?

TIENKEN: No. That was one of the curious things of Ethiopia.

Another one I can remember was the foreign minister when I first got there, Kifle Wodajo, who was fairly pro-West. He went off on a—I think it was a OAU meeting somewhere in Africa, and did not return. And we began to be concerned that he had not only defected but probably had gone to the States, where a good many of the Ethiopians did go. And sure enough, about a month later, word came to us that he was in the States; he had defected. We were fairly sure the Ethiopian government knew it by this time and waited for something to happen. And nothing happened.

Q: Well, now, this was somewhat after you left, around—some other time, I don't know—was Elizabeth Raspolic there while you were there?

TIENKEN: No.

Q: We have an interview with her, and she was in charge of the consular section, I think, from '78 to '80 and saying one of her major problems was tied to these defections. A number of American women had married Ethiopian officials. When the officials got orders to go somewhere, they would leave, they wouldn't come back, leaving the American wives and their children there. It was quite a problem to get them out of the country because the Ethiopian government wanted to hang on to these women and the children in order to attract the husbands back. Did you get involved in any of those?

TIENKEN: I had enough problems, and, fortunately, that wasn't one of them, although I can well imagine that could have been a problem.

Q: Well, that probably was taking place at a later thing. This is a major difficulty.

TIENKEN: You weren't always to predict the Ethiopians. We had a case somewhat in reverse. Right after all these various things had happened in expelling the people in one site or another, one of the USIA officers wanted to marry an Ethiopian girl. He had been expelled and I think was in Bulgaria at the time, if I remember right. And he asked for permission to come back and marry the girl and take her out of Ethiopia. Well, as an expellee, I thought he had as much chance as a snowball in that warm place of getting permission to come, let alone marry the girl and take her out. And it was only a month or two after he had been expelled. I tried it anyway on the Ethiopians. And to my great surprise, they said okay. So he came, married the girl, and left, and the girl went with him.

Q: Tell me, in this—and again I have to caveat this as saying obviously this is an unclassified interview—but how well were you served by the CIA in what was a very difficult and unpredictable and dangerous situation?

TIENKEN: Oh, I can say very, very well. They were very good. Our intelligence was not lacking, I think it is fair to say.

Q: And you were fully, you know, as best one knows, anyway, you felt that this was a good, strong arm of how you made judgments. In other words, it wasn't being done and sent somewhere else, and you weren't the beneficiary.

TIENKEN: No, no. I was well served. They made no judgments that I was ever aware of that were—they may not have always agreed with what I and the State Department political people said, but they always let us know what they saying and gave us a chance to comment. I remember doing that one time. And the relationship was very, very harmonious.

Q: How about with the desk and the rest of the State Department? Obviously, an extremely difficult situation. Do you think your difficulty was appreciated, and were you

getting the support you needed? And the instructions, do you feel they were forthcoming, or were you left in an ambiguous situation?

TIENKEN: No, no. Not always the case in my Foreign Service career, but in this case, we and the country office worked very closely together. The country director was Dick Post. He and I saw eye to eye on practically everything.

Q: He is an old horn of Africa hand, anyway.

TIENKEN: That's right.

Q: This is Richard St. something or other—

TIENKEN: St. Francis Post.

Q: St. Francis Post, yes.

TIENKEN: He and I saw eye to eye. We got along very well. I think his boss at the time was probably both Bill Harrop and Talcott Seelye as senior DASs, deputy assistant secretaries, in the Bureau of African Affairs. And Dick Moose who was Assistant Secretary for Africa. But I detected no particular differences with them either.

Q: So, I mean, you all knew your brief was basically to hang on in there and see what developments were.

TIENKEN: Yes.

Q: Did you have relations—how were you calling the Soviet and Cuban penetration? Did you see this as going to be effective? How did you see it?

TIENKEN: Well, I think that it became clear—I think it is fair to say that probably the earlier contacts with the Soviets in terms of actual assistance was probably kept fairly closely held. I doubt if the U.S. Government, and certainly I didn't, knew about it because I think

it began shortly after I got there as DCM. But as time went on, this relationship began to become clearer and clearer. And by the time I left in the fall of '77, you were beginning to see the first real outward manifestations of the new presence, both in terms of equipment and people, troops mostly.

By the time of the Ogaden War, that is, early '77, it was fairly clear that that's the direction the Ethiopians were going. As long as we were taking the position that we weren't going to supply the Ethiopians with the military assistance they wanted to cope with their various insurrections, that they were going to get it from somewhere, and it was clear that the Soviets were going to do that. So I don't think it was any doubt in our minds that the two were drawing closer together. Our relationship was suffering. As far down the road as we could see, it would probably remain that way, at least as long as the Soviets and/or the Ethiopians, but particularly the Soviets, found it to their advantage to maintain that relationship.

Q: Do we ever take a look at something of this nature in the long term? I mean, it is easy in hindsight, but at the time when you are under the pressure of saying, "Okay, let them get mixed up." I mean, this is an insolvable problem, particularly when you talk about the civil wars that are going on there, the Somali-Ethiopian conflict, including some problems with the Sudan, and to say, "Okay. Be my guest." I mean, it is somewhat the same way as saying, "Okay. Americans going to Vietnam. I mean, we are not going to stop you." I mean, do we see this like that, or were we sort of narrowly focused in saying this is going to hurt us?

TIENKEN: I would have to say that I had a certain feeling of my own and indeed communicated it to Washington, but I can't say that I did it all that strongly, i.e., the "be my guest" feeling. But the government doesn't work that way, my friend, as you know. The State Department works in terms of the immediate and the near future. Administrations don't last that long. Long-range planning of the kind you are talking about is not all that common—it may be done, but nobody necessarily acts on it.

Q: Well, also true, I suppose, is the other side. I mean, particularly in a case like this, is who lost Ethiopia to the communists, too.

TIENKEN: Yes.

Q: Because somebody is going to come up with a map showing a big red blotch in the horn of Africa.

TIENKEN: That's right.

Q: And even in the short term, politically, that is a no-no.

TIENKEN: Yes. It would be nice to think that you could do that sort of thing, plan and whatnot, but it doesn't often happen.

Q: What was your evaluation of Mengistu?

TIENKEN: I met the man three times. He is very charming to talk to, I must say. Each of the three times with the exception of a couple of individual questions that I had proposed to him on the cutbacks, we, nevertheless, basically talked past each other. He made his points, and I made mine, and they weren't necessarily the same thing, and we didn't resolve very much. He spoke English, but he never interviewed me in English. He would speak in Amharic, which was then translated. I would reply in English, which was not translated. And I gather from a couple of my successors that happened to them as well.

Was he and is he a communist? Or was he simply an Ethiopian nationalist who was willing to look to any source to keep the country together? That was the great question. Personally I leaned towards Mengistu the nationalist and less toward the pure, outright communist point of view. Anything he did in communist terms was what he felt he had to do to placate his Soviet and/or Cuban benefactors. Some of my colleagues today maintain that he, in fact, is a communist. And I think as time has gone on since my departure, his

actions have indicated that he does feel more to the left than I necessarily thought he was when I saw him.

He certainly is a ruthless man. He was only one of three vice chairman of the PMAC when I first came to Ethiopia. One of them he certainly eliminated about a year later. And the second one was eliminated shortly after I left, along with a variety of other members of the government. Shooting down students seemed to cause no great problem. He once during one of his long sessions in Revolution Square railing at the, among others, the CIA and the United States in general, emphasized his point of being anti-American by throwing a bottle full of allegedly blood—actually it was wine or some other sort of stuff—on the ground to emphasize his point. I didn't happen to be at that one because we weren't invited, but it is just as well. What do you do? [Laughter]

Certainly a nationalist. He certainly has tried hard to keep Ethiopia as a single state. But his methods are, for my money, deplorable.

Q: Well, is there anything else you would like to say about Ethiopia at that point?

TIENKEN: I think that's enough.

Q: Then we move to your appointment from there as ambassador to Gabon from 1978 to '81. Was this a reward, or did this come as a surprise? How did you perceive this?

TIENKEN: I don't know whether it was a reward or not, but there may have been a small element of taking care of that poor fellow who had been out there under the gun in Ethiopia for the time. I must say that I had the reverse feeling that you mentioned earlier about leaving Ethiopia for Gabon that I had coming from Tunis to Ethiopia. Namely, that leaving Ethiopia for a nice, quiet, peaceful, pro-Western, pro-American country like Gabon was a pleasure.

Q: I might ask here, although there are other interviews that are concentrated on the women, how did your wife and your family survive under these conditions?

TIENKEN: My wife did beautifully, I must say. It wasn't fun night after night to sit in the house in the compound and listen to explosions, shots, and what have you, at least in the early evening and often late at night. It doesn't do much for your peace of mind. But she survived it very well.

There was a point in time, which happens at so many posts and similar circumstances, where it was a question of whether we should evacuate the dependents. And you are damned if you do and damned if you don't. My own personal feeling was that the longer we could keep the dependents there, provided that they were not in serious danger, the more effective the embassy would be. And we had long discussions in country team meetings on that very subject. By and large, I think most of my colleagues shared that view, but it was dangerous on the streets, particularly at night. Not that the Ethiopians were looking for foreigners; they weren't. But there was all together too many opportunities to be in the wrong place at the wrong time when they were hunting their own people.

So you took a gamble. If you said, “Send the dependents home,” as is happens usually in the State Department or in the government, it is a long time before they can come back. Or you kept them there and took the risk of somebody getting hurt. But the ultimate advantage being as long as you kept them there, you kept families together, people were happier, and my own feeling was that they performed better.

Q: Oh, you are right.

TIENKEN: As I say, we debated it, but we finally decided that—and took a rather strong view with Washington—that they should stay. If you guessed wrong, you were deep in the soup.

Q: Yes.

TIENKEN: Fortunately, it came out all right.

Q: Well, back to Gabon. What was the situation in Gabon, and what were American interests in Gabon when you went there? We are talking about 1978.

TIENKEN: American interests in Gabon were fairly limited. We did have some mining interests. U.S. Steel, for example, was the majority stockholder in a manganese operation in northwestern Gabon. We did have some oil interests there. Gabon is a member of OPEC. The oil companies weren't particularly successful at the time, but they were there.

Gabon, was an ex-French colony, and maintained strong ties with France. The president, Omar Bongo, nonetheless liked to set his own foreign policy. Therefore, from our point of view, he wanted to listen and when it suited him, to support the American point of view on a variety of things around the world. He would be helpful, for example, when discussing the Libyan incursions into Chad or countering the radical influence in the Congo in Brazzaville. So Bongo did, in fact, try and stay somewhat independent of the French in foreign policy items. One of his favorite phrases was, “We are not a chasse gard#e,” namely, an influenced area, a closed hunting area, if you like, of the French. Meaning that we don't necessarily follow the French line.

Q: Yes.

TIENKEN: On the economic side, things were very different. Ties with French interests were close. But the Americans were there and managed to survive okay. Again, stability in that part of Africa, which Bongo himself provided. There was no problem there. And, finally, seeking Gabonese support, both in African circles and in the United Nations, for some of the positions that we thought we wanted to take.

Q: Were there any problems with UN votes or Organization of African States?

TIENKEN: Not with the Gabonese. However, the OAU was not notorious for supporting us in a number of international forums as a group. But the Gabonese, if they didn't actually vote with us a lot of the times at the OAU when we knew we were going to be opposed, would find it convenient not to be there.

Q: How did you deal with the Gabonese government?

TIENKEN: Well, the tip-off was when I presented my credentials to the president, whose nephew was the foreign minister. The president looked me—right after I had done the formal bit, we sat down and had a little chat. He said, “Whenever you want to talk foreign policy issues,” looking straight at his nephew, “you see me.” And that's what I did. So you dealt with Bongo directly.

Q: Can you give me how you saw him, how we operated as a leader, a president of his country?

TIENKEN: President Bongo, as a leader of his country, was virtually unopposed. Gabon was basically the only African country I ever knew where there was very little opposition either at home or abroad. There was no exile movement in France, for example. There was some tribal differences in the country itself, but Bongo handled those pretty well. Occasionally the students kicked up their heels, but found little domestic support. Furthermore, Bongo, his country, Gabon, because of manganese and oil and uranium was, in per capita terms, the wealthiest black African country—and still is—on the continent. So wealthy, in fact, that they didn't even qualify for U.S. aid or United Nations aid either, for that matter.

Q: Is that—

TIENKEN: I shouldn't say United Nations. I should say the World Bank.

Q: Was the wealth distributed fairly well?

TIENKEN: Reasonably well, yes. You saw very little poverty in Gabon. The main city of Libreville had some areas that were not particularly attractive in terms of housing, but the people would be well-shod, usually well-dressed, and fairly neat.

Q: So you didn't have—

TIENKEN: So it trickled down.

Q: I mean, there was an honest-to-God trickle down.

TIENKEN: Yes.

Q: Maybe not perfect, but . . .

TIENKEN: Yes.

Q: How was Bongo personally to deal with?

TIENKEN: He was charming. He was lovely. He was accessible, for one thing. And because he was accessible, he wasn't hard to reach if you had to get him in a hurry unless he was out of the country. He would listen carefully. More often than not, he would agree with you. And he would often share with you, particularly about the Congo Brazzaville people, because his home province in Gabon was bordered on Congo Brazzaville.

Q: How did he view the Congo Brazzaville?

TIENKEN: Well, there was the Peace Corps in Gabon. There wasn't AID, but there was Peace Corps, and they built schools, among other things. The Peace Corps had been chased out of Gabon in the '60s, but they were long since back. Bongo liked to see these young Americans building schools. It didn't cost him a dime. There was some questions about whether or not the Peace Corps would ever go into the Congo Brazzaville. He told me one time that he kind of lectured President Sassou-Nguesso of Congo Brazzaville on

the virtues of the Peace Corps. He said, “Now, here these people are out there building all for free these schools and teaching English, what is your problem, sir?” [Laughter] He didn't persuade him, but that was sort of—

Q: I'm not sure if it happened exactly when you were there or not, but it was something I was looking into, doing some research, that the Security and Exchange Commission in the States was looking into some foreign payments and claimed that Page Airlines gave President Bongo $200,000 of a $4.7 million deal. Were you there when that news came out?

TIENKEN: Not guilty, sir. [Laughter]

Q: Not guilty. [Laughter]

TIENKEN: That was, I think, after my time.

Q: Oh. Was corruption a problem there or not?

TIENKEN: To a degree, yes. A couple of the ministers were known as five-percenters. But it wasn't nearly, from my view, as blatant as it was in a couple of the other African countries I have been in, like the Congo.

Q: Speaking of the Congo, were you involved when they were flying Gabonese troops to Zaire? This was in Shaba province, which is Shaba being which province?

TIENKEN: Katanga.

Q: That's Katanga. How did that come about? I mean, where you involved in getting Gabon to send troops to put down this latest in a series of basically mercenary-inspired—

TIENKEN: I was there. That was another Zairian mercenary operation.

Q: Yes.

TIENKEN: And I can't say that I played a strong role in persuading Bongo to provide troops, but we did provide airlift for him. Bongo liked to think he was a premier Africanist. Since that operation you were talking about was essentially an OAU operation, this was a good place for him to make hay in his African credentials. So I think he pretty much came to the conclusion on his own that he wanted to do that. He certainly wasn't going to turn down our effort to transport his troops down there and did.

Q: Did they play any particular role there?

TIENKEN: As far as I know, not much.

Q: Well, now were there any border problems that we got involved with there?

TIENKEN: Not in Gabon. At one time or another, Bongo tangled with the Cameroonians. There were a couple of nasty periods when Cameroonians were attacked in the streets and taxicabs turned over and some of them burnt. And earlier than that, West Africans—

Q: When you say West Africans, these would be from where?

TIENKEN: Well, places like Guinea, Togo, places like so. And these were essentially over—well, one of them was over a fancied slight between Bongo and—which president in West Africa? Benin, I think it was at an OAU meeting. And then all West Africans became Beninois, Beninese, and they got rounded up and sent back. And it was rather difficult business.

Well, after he had finally gotten all these people out, next thing we began hearing, and in some cases actually seeing, were truckloads of Togolese, in particular, or Beninese with Togo passports sort of filtering back. Gabon was a nice place for these people to be because it had money.

Q: And you could make money.

TIENKEN: And you could make money.

Q: Before we leave Gabon, you also had Sao Tome and Principe in your ambassadorial responsibility. What did involve and was there any importance to us?

TIENKEN: We had no representation there. So I would go over there, oh, two or three times a year.

Q: They are a couple of islands, aren't they?

TIENKEN: Just a couple of islands. And you got out there by chartering a small plane and hoping that the radar on the plane worked because if you missed those two small islands, you kept right on going out into the middle of the Atlantic, and that was a little touch and go.

The Sao Tomeans were in the radical camp in African terms. And for my first couple of visits there, I almost felt I was home in Ethiopia because you had the same big, bright red banners with the socialist slogans and so forth. But they were much more gentle about it than the Ethiopians were. I could always see the power structure when I went out there. I didn't normally have a great deal to discuss with them, but I did feel that we ought to try to make some effort to maintain some kind of relationship with the Sao Tomeans and that AID might try and help.

At the close of the two or three years that I went out there, we eventually did establish an AID presence. One man actually went—an agricultural project of some substance. I gather that Sao Tomeans since my departure—I was even successful, to my surprise, one day in arranging for a warship to visit, which went modestly well. It had a few problems, but it went modestly well. I didn't think they would agree to that at all. But for their own non-alliance status, they said, “Okay, come.”

But apart from that, we didn't have very much contact with Sao Tome, nor was there any particular reason. There are only 70,000 of them. And I used to go out there and think, “I am going to go out and see a whole government in a country that isn't even the size of the town I grew up in.” [Laughter]

Q: Well, moving from what obviously was one of the more pleasant posts you had in Gabon, you came back to what I don't think would have been a very pleasant post, and that was to personnel in Washington at a time of great change. This must have been a very difficult assignment, wasn't it? What was your job?

TIENKEN: Well, the job was Director of FCA, Foreign Service Career Assignments and Development. That office, as you know, is responsible for the assignment of all Foreign Service personnel. It was a big office. I had probably more people working with me in that one than I did in most of the assignments I ever had in the field.

It was tasked as much with implementing the Foreign Service Act of 1980 and its various provisions as anything else in terms of assignments and career development. And that did cause some problems, some of which are still around in some of the same forms and some in different forms. It was an assignment I thoroughly enjoyed. Apart from the fact that being in that kind of assignment you see very clearly how the power structure of the Department of State works, which was always illuminating, you liked to think, that, you could use the assignment process to do a little something for the Foreign Service and/or individuals that were in it. Not everybody always agreed with us, but we did help, I think. I think the office took great pride in making good assignments.

Q: Could you explain a bit about your side of the Foreign Service Act of 1980? What was different, and what impacted on you and your operation particularly?

TIENKEN: I have to think now a little bit.

Q: You came in there in 1981.

TIENKEN: '81, yes. We got involved in a variety of problems, such as implementing security. We had the whole security cone, which wasn't created by the act but was an offshoot of the act later. That had a whole variety of problems associated with it.

There was implementing the cone system, which had been essentially sanctified by the act of '80.

Q: These cones being our term for specialties.

TIENKEN: Yes, the consular, the administrative, and so forth.

We got in the beginning of what became and still is an attempt to establish a new balance of seniors, middle grade, and junior officers in the Service. FSO-1s were required to declare that they wished to become senior officers and to be so considered by the promotion panels. They would then have six cracks at it. If they didn't make it, they were out.

Q: With six years in order to make it.

TIENKEN: It was the so-called six-year window. In the four years I was in that job, that turned out to be one of the more difficult things. It still hasn't been resolved, as you know.

Q: What was the problem?

TIENKEN: The problem essentially was that when I entered personnel we were overstocked, if you like, with senior officers. And the rules of the game then were that there were time-in-grade policies which were changed by the act. But still, the Service was essentially a little top-heavy. The problem was how do you deal with that in terms-if you kept promoting middle-grade officers in the numbers we had been doing into the senior

officer ranks the numbers problem wouldn't impact unless steps were taken to thin out the ranks of the senior officers.

The act, as you know, created the Senior Foreign Service along with the Senior Executive Service, with its own rules that seniors had to follow, and we had to administer. But in order to maintain some kind of balance, it was provided that middle grade officers at the O-1 level, namely, the top of the middle grades, would be required to declare that they wished to join the Senior Foreign Service and that they would be given six chances on the promotion panel to get promoted into the Senior Foreign Service. If they weren't promoted in, they were out.

You then decided when you wanted to do that in terms of how many years in time in grade you had left in O-1 and make bets that during one of those years you would get promoted. Some people guessed wrong. A number of people didn't make it later on.

The problem is still around, because a class action suit was filed about the time I was leaving by the first group that didn't make it. And that hasn't been solved yet.

Q: At the very beginning of this interview, I asked how you felt about going to Lourenco Marques, and you said, "Well, you know, when you got an assignment, you kind of went." And I know this is the way I felt about it. I wasn't wild about going to Dhahran in Saudi Arabia, but it never occurred to me to challenge it. Again, the stakes weren't as high. You did the best job you could. The feeling was, well, one assignment at a place that isn't so wonderful will balance off with another one. It will all work out.

But with the new Foreign Service Act—at least the feeling I have—is that particularly when you get nearer the time of announcing you are going for the window and particularly during those six years, your assignments are all important. A good assignment, meaning a high-profile assignment, where one can say, "Oh, my gosh. So-and-so is the deputy chief of mission or something in a place where they are having a war on is a good place to get

promoted, and to be number-three man in the political section of Switzerland isn't." But these jobs have to be filled. I mean, the good and the bad.

How did you in your position resolve what in some ways one can almost call a dead-end job, but one that had to be filled? How did you sell that to somebody?

TIENKEN: No, those were always difficult, Stu. To go back to your business of when you and I came into the Service, there was something called the April Fool's Day operation, where you were given an opportunity to say where you wanted to go in terms of Atlantic, Pacific, Europe, Africa, or some other place and that's all.

Q: The reason it was called April Fool, for the note, is it was a wish list that you presented. It was due in on the first of April of that year.

TIENKEN: That's right. But that's the only opportunity you ever had to express in formal terms where you wanted to go and what you wanted to do.

The act of '80 did not create the bidding system. That basically had already been there. But by the time of the act of '80, you had the two separate parts of the personnel assignments process, namely, the assignment officers themselves and the career development officers. And you had a whole elaborate bidding system in which you were given an opportunity to see all the positions that would come up in the next nine months and to bid on them. And eventually the system would come up with one bidder, hopefully, to take the job.

As you quite properly pointed out, there were jobs that nobody wanted. And the system does and did have a mechanism for what amounted to forced assignments for somebody who didn't bid but also maybe didn't have another job. These were always difficult cases. Eventually, through persuasion, one way or another, you of course get the jobs filled because they had to be filled.

Q: Did you sometimes feel you were a snake-oil salesman?

TIENKEN: Oh, yes. Fortunately, I had a lot of people with me that could play the snake-oil salesman role better than I. But, yes, there was some of that. In other words, the officer of today or the officer of the '80s had many more opportunities than you and I did to express where he wanted to go and the position he wanted. And many of them thought in terms that you mentioned, “If I don't get X job or Y job, my whole career will be ruined.” I don't necessarily think that was true, but still that was the perception that was fairly widespread.

Q: You mentioned learning about the power structure. From your point of view, in many ways there are two real power centers, you might say, at least the way I see it, within the State Department. One is the policy. How do we deal with country X or Y? And this is broken down by various bureaus, except maybe at the very top. But the other is personnel and the assignment. This is where real honest-to-God power lies. How did you see from your vantage point the power structure of the Department of State? Where was the clout?

TIENKEN: The two things you mentioned, personnel and policy, are quite clearly linked. And I guess the simplest way of answering your question is if you wanted a certain policy —if you were already a policy-maker and you wanted a certain policy developed or continued or amended if you like, there were certain officers that you knew out there in the Service that would do that for you. And they would make those wishes known very clearly to the Director General's office, who is also the Director of Personnel. So that when it came time to fill the jobs that were clearly the ones that were going to be in the important policy positions, apart from the political aspect of it, what you saw was who was the one or what organization was calling the shots or making the request to the Director General. That could be very illuminating.

Q: Well, were there any bureaus or areas that were particularly strong that you found that were more in charge than others?

TIENKEN: In my time—that was '81 to '85—I think probably the European Bureau was the best organized in terms of who they wanted, where they wanted them to go, and in making their views known. But it's dangerous to say that this is common over a long period of time. Bureaus depend upon the personnel that are in them and the personalities of the personnel. In the terms that we are talking about, a strong bureau today may not necessarily be a strong bureau tomorrow.

EUR was well organized. They always, of course, had the vast majority of bidders, so they had more people to work with. And they could be very choosy in who they wanted, including people the system said ought to go some other place for their own career development. NEA was good, particularly in terms of placement of Arab-language officers.

Q: Yes.

TIENKEN: But every bureau would have to take some people they didn't want. That was a principle of fairness, if you like.

Q: So did you find yourself calling up and saying, "All right, if you want A, you are going to have to take B." I mean, a certain amount of horse-trading.

TIENKEN: That is not unknown. [Laughter]

Q: Did you get involved at all in political appointments?

TIENKEN: No.

Q: Thank God.

TIENKEN: Happily.

Q: Before we move on, what sort of role did both you and Secretary [Alexander] Haig and then Secretary [George] Shultz—did either of them play much of a role? Were you aware of their wants or desires?

TIENKEN: No. To the best of my knowledge, neither one of them did. I knew more about Secretary Shultz than I did about Haig. But Shultz would occasionally get involved in ambassadorial appointments and discussing those kind of things with the White House. Whether Haig ever did that, I honestly don't know. But I never had the feeling that Shultz got much below that level. Most of that was handled either by the assistant secretaries or the Under Secretary for Management. Not, interestingly enough, Ron Spiers, who managed to stay out of that fairly well, but a couple of his predecessors did. They would make their views rather strongly known. Ultimately, the assignment process was the responsibility of the Director General. And he or she does not have the easiest kind of job because he or she is the focal point for the high-level pressures from the assistant secretaries, the under secretaries, and so forth. And they have to make compromises sometimes.

Q: In your particular position, did you have much to do with the placement of minorities, tandem couples, or women in order to make sure that there was fair representation within the ranks? Was this your responsibility or someone else's?

TIENKEN: Yes, except that putting aside the tandem question for the moment, which is a little separate, the women and minorities question was really part of the bidding process. In other words, people would say, “We need to have more blacks in wherever.” Other people would say, “You are falling down in your duty in that area because you haven't got blacks.”

But the main reason you didn't have blacks for a particular job was usually that no black wanted to go there. And you couldn't force, except in very rare instances which you never liked to do, you couldn't force a minority to go to a particular job. So that if the system worked properly and the bidding system worked properly and all of that, they stood

the same chance as anybody else for getting the jobs that they were interested in, not necessarily what the system wanted them to be in. And that is still a problem, at least a perceived problem. I am not sure that the system as currently exists can adequately always cope with it if our intention is to make certain that they are spread around, if you like.

Q: Yes, yes.

TIENKEN: Tandems were a different problem.

Q: Well, how were the women different?

TIENKEN: Women, you know, bid on jobs like everybody else. They would be selected or not by the system and/or the bureaus on their merit. I think I can fairly say that.

Q: You feel things to have progressed to this point.

TIENKEN: Yes.

Q: The one problem we were talking at lunch that you might mention, some of the problems of what is often considered particularly those who aspire to be ambassadors on crucial assignment, and that is a DCMship. You were a DCM three times. And there has been a suit saying that women have proportionally not been appointed as DCMs. Looking at it as you saw it at that time, what were some of the factors that worked on this?

TIENKEN: There were two or three. First of all, in the early '80s there weren't that many senior women officers that were qualified for those kind of jobs. Therefore, unless you did it by fiat, they could only be expected to fill proportionally the same number of DCM jobs relative to their numbers as their male counterparts did.

But a dilemma, for my money, which isn't often mentioned is the fact that chiefs of mission are given the right to select their own DCMs. And whereas the system would

like to see minorities and women in those positions, as long as the chief of mission has the right to select his own DCM or her own DCM, the system doesn't have other than moral persuasion, if you like, to actually assign people as DCM over the objection of an ambassador. And there is a perfectly good reason for giving the ambassador that right. His DCM or her DCM is going to be in charge more than once during the chief of mission's tour. And the chief of Mission naturally wants somebody whom he or she feels they can trust to follow their lead and carry out their policies. If by doing this they can find a minority or woman, for DCM, fine. The system works. But the cumulative choices of their DCMs by Chiefs of Mission can slow the proportional relationships I mentioned and the system is not likely to force a DCM assignment on a Chief of Mission who wants someone else.

Q: How about the tandem couples? Is this a problem for you? The tandem couple, I might say in the Foreign Service parlance, are two usually Foreign Service officers, male and female, who marry each other and then the problem is to assign them.

TIENKEN: I guess, Stu, the tandem problem was the problem that gave me the most headaches in the four years I was in FCA. Finding two jobs at a single post that were unrelated to each other in the sense that there was no supervisory relationship was simply not easy. There were times when we would have to say, “There aren't two jobs if you want to go to that post. There is a job over in another post close by, but not the same post. Would you consider that?” Or there are rarely two career-enhancing jobs at the same post for tandems. “One of you has to take the lead. Who is going to be the one to take advantage of a career-enhancing job this time, and who takes the job that may not be a career-enhancing job?” That was a couple of problems. There was another involving other agencies. There were tandems of people in the State Department married to people in other agencies. How do you work together to reconcile positions at the same post but in different agencies? And these went on and on and on and on.

I don't know how many tandems I used to have to talk to and say, “Look, there are certain things you are going to have to accept if you are going to be married in the Foreign

Service. One is that the system is not always going to be able to give you at the same time the same kind of jobs that you want at the same post. Are you prepared to accept that?" Most of the times people would say yes.

Q: At that time.

TIENKEN: At that time, yes. "Are you prepared for one or the other to be 'the lead candidate' in the assignment process?" That didn't always work out.

Tandems worked all right, but they have a built-in disadvantage in the fact that most posts that can accommodate tandems are larger posts. Clearly, you have more jobs. The smaller posts, the Librevilles of the world, for example, don't have very many jobs, so that in almost any job in Libreville, you were somehow subject to supervisory responsibility by the other half of the tandem, which is a no-no. Therefore, many of the tandems have to be assigned to the larger posts, which means that the singles get the small posts, many of which are not in some of the greatest places of the world. They sometimes resent that.

So these kinds of problems go on and on. I guess, as I said, tandem assignments were probably my single biggest headache. Not that I wasn't sympathetic to them; I was. But working them out was hard work.

Q: Should we talk a little about the inspection business?

TIENKEN: I don't know that there is a great deal to say on that subject.

Q: All right. Actually, after retirement you became an inspector.

TIENKEN: No, before.

Q: Before retirement. Well, why don't we leave that off.

TIENKEN: Sure.

Q: Well, you know, Art, having done these things, I ask the two questions, looking back, what gave you greatest satisfaction, do you think, of your career, would you say?

TIENKEN: Well, I don't know. I guess people ask me what was your favorite post. My answer was always every post I was in presented its own set of problems and its own cast of characters. And I think found every one of them interesting.

I think probably the most difficult assignment was Ethiopia. I guess I was pleased to think that we survived that. Kept the ball rolling, so to speak. A little bloodied maybe, but we did survive it.

What was I most pleased about? I was pleased to get out of Ethiopia, but I was also pleased that we had managed to stay the course, if you like.

Q: Well, then when somebody comes to you today, and I imagine they probably do, what about a career—I'm a young person, and what about a career in the Foreign Service? How do you reply?

TIENKEN: My first answer is if I had to do it over again, I would.

Q: Yes.

TIENKEN: And then I'm often apt to tell them some of the things we are talking about today. But I always found the career very rewarding. It turned out to be what I wanted it to be. It was varied. And, happily, my wife shared all of that. And so we were very—I think “satisfied” is the right word, when it came to an end back in '87.

Q: Good. Okay, Art, thank you very much.

TIENKEN: My pleasure.

Q: Well, that was fun.

End of interview